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U.S. Pilot Shot Down by Laos Reds Escapes

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The United States Navy pilot who was shot down over Laos's Plain of Jars by Communist gunfire in June has escaped safely to Thailand, the White House announced last night.

He is Navy Lt. Charles F. Klusman, 30, of San Diego, who was piloting a jet reconnaissance plane based on the U.S. carrier Kitty Hawk.

White House Press Secretary George Reedy told reporters Klusmann had been brought to Udorn, an Air Force base in Northeast Thailand and "appears to be in relatively good health."

State Department sources

said the United States was taken by surprise, particularly

since Klusmann made his escape from Khang Khay, the very headquarters of the Communist-led Pathet Lao.

Khang Khay lies on the edge of the Plain to which Klusmann had to parachute from his crippled plane on June 6.

U.S. officials in Washington lacked details last night on Klusmann's actual means of escape. However, they presumed he had worked his way behind the Pathet Lao-held lines and then been assisted through non-Communist territory in Laos and subsequently

flown to the air base in Thailand.

When Klusmann was shot down he was taking part in a tricky U.S. air reconnaissance mission over Laos which had been organized to get details on how far and in what directions the Pathet Lao were going in their sudden surge forward.

The carrier Kitty Hawk with its reconnaissance planes had been rushed into the South China Sea off South Viet-Nam for the maneuver.

When helicopters attempted to rescue Klusmann from the clearing to which he had parachuted he waved them off just before Pathet Lao troops closed in on him.

At the White House, Reedy said one other U.S. pilot still

remains in Pathet Lao hands. He is Eugene DeBruin, a civilian pilot for Air America, which is described as a civilian company under contract to the Royal Lao government.

State Department officials said DeBruin presumably is being held in central Laos and Klusmann had no contact with him.

Klusmann's wife, Sara, received the Distinguished Flying Cross in his behalf at a Pentagon ceremony here on June 30. His last letter to his wife from his mud hut prison was dated July 2.